



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***HABITUS TRANSITION EXPERIENCE AMONG YEMENI COMMUNITY
LEADERS IN MALAYSIA***

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**HABITUS TRANSITION EXPERIENCE AMONG YEMENI COMMUNITY
LEADERS IN MALAYSIA**

By

NABIL MOHSEN ALBAHRI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

October 2017

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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NABIL MOHSEN ALBAHRI

October 2017

Chairman : Professor Mohammad Shatar B. Sabran, PhD
Faculty : Human Ecology

The study explores the habitus transition experience of the Yemeni Community leaders in Malaysia (YCM leaders) and how this experience affected their perspectives, beliefs, behaviors and practices of community leadership. YCM leaders' experience of community leadership had two major issues; their relationship with each other and their relationship with the Malaysian society ecological system, i.e., the surrounding environmental context. This study was designed to address this research gap by exploring YCM leaders, as participants, and experiences of habitus developmental changes regarding community leadership. This process of investigation will lead to understanding the change and the YCM leaders' mechanisms of adapting and learning from the Malaysian sociocultural context, i.e., the micro- meso- exo- and macro-system. It will explore the factors in the local context that influence this developmental change other than religion and the process of reforming the perception of the community leader. This study has four objectives that were organized to close this gap by; (a) exploring YCM leaders' perspective and behavioral changes about community leadership, (b) understanding how YCM leaders contest for the position of community leader (c) exploring the influence of the Malaysian ecological system context on YCM leaders' habitus transition, and (d) investigating the challenges that YCM leaders are facing especially YCM women leaders.

The study has utilized the qualitative case study methodology that included participants' observations, semi-structured interviews and documents analysis to the 12 YCM leaders who have been living in Malaysia for more than six years and who have played leadership roles among the Yemeni Community in Malaysia. The first finding of the study indicated that YCM leaders have been experiencing gradual habitus transition of perspective and practice regarding community leadership from the Yemeni environmental context to the Malaysian one. The second finding of the study indicated that YCM leaders have been experiencing shift in contesting and

competing for the community leadership position. They are competing for the position by accumulating resources, skills and knowledge rather than claiming biological right to it. The third finding of the study indicated that YCM leaders have been influenced by the Malaysian environmental context in many ways according to the length of time they spent in Malaysia and the level of engagement with the Malaysian environmental context. The fourth finding of the study indicated that YCM leaders and YCM women leaders have been experiencing multiple challenges as they exercise community leadership. The main challenges they face are; the homeland environmental habitus regarding the interrelations and the *Islamists'* interpretations of women's roles. This idea may enhance and develop YCM future generations as Yemeni students' and community leaders' understanding about the perspective and practices of community leadership become similar to the local practices. YCM educational council may initiate programs for educating and training the next generation about fair and normative social contracts and arrangements that create peace and harmony among the socially and socio-politically unstable Islamic societies such as that of Yemen. The outcomes of this research have emerged to contribute in bridging the gap that has existed relating to theory and practice of community leadership development as well as the individuals' socialization and interrelationship dynamics.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PENGALAMAN PERALIHAN HABITUS DALAM KALANGAN PEMIMPIN MASYARAKAT YAMAN DI MALAYSIA

Oleh

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Kajian ini meneroka pengalaman peralihan ciri-ciri fizikal dan kontekstual pemimpin komuniti Yaman di Malaysia (iaitu pemimpin YCM) dan bagaimana pengalaman ini mempengaruhi perspektif, kepercayaan, tingkah laku dan amalan kepimpinan masyarakat dan kecairan sosial mereka. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mentafsir bagaimana pemimpin YCM mengubah taktik kepimpinan komuniti mereka dari perspektif dan tingkah laku “Sheikh Yamani” kepada peri laku kelompok bergelar Dato di Malaysia, bagaimana mereka belajar daripada masyarakat setempat, bagaimana untuk membangunkan strategi dan kemahiran mereka untuk meyebabkan berlakunya kecairan sosial dan kepimpinan masyarakat. Kajian ini juga menyiasat bagaimana pemimpin YCM membina kepercayaan diri mereka tentang keupayaan dan kemahiran untuk membangunkan kepimpinan, bagaimana mereka memerhatikan dan meniru model pemimpin masyarakat setempat. Selain itu, kajian itu cuba menjelaskan bagaimana pemimpin wanita YCM mengembangkan persepsi mereka tentang kecairan sosial.

Kajian ini telah menggunakan kaedah kualitatif yang melibatkan pemerhatian para pemimpin YCM dan wawancara separuh berstruktur kepada 12 pemimpin YCM yang telah tinggal di Malaysia selama lebih daripada lima tahun dan yang telah memainkan peranan sebagai pemimpin dan membangunkan kepimpinan dalam kalangan YCM. Penemuan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa para pemimpin YCM telah mengamalkan dan mentransformasi ciri-ciri fizikal dan kontekstual kepimpinan komuniti mereka daripada norma sosial budaya Yamani dalam konteks kepimpinan masyarakat dan kecairan sosial kepada cara Malaysia. YCM telah mentransformasi gaya kepimpinan komuniti Sheikh-sheikh Yaman kepada cara Dato-Dato Malaysia bahkan dipengaruhi perspektif dan amalan kepimpinan mereka. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa peralihan ciri-ciri fizikal dan kontekstual pemimpin YCM mengenai kecairan sosial dan mengamalkan kepimpinan komuniti Dato di Malaysia berdasarkan pengumpulan

modal kewangan sebagai cara memaksimumkan keberkesanan diri mereka sebagai pemimpin masyarakat.

Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa para pemimpin YCM melihat dan meniru model kepimpinan komuniti setempat di Malaysia. Bagi pemimpin wanita pula, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa walaupun para pemimpin wanita YCM menunjukkan perkembangan dalam persuasi mereka untuk kecairan sosial, mereka telah mencapai tahap penglibatan kerana banyak faktor. Idea ini dapat meningkatkan dan membangunkan pemahaman para pelajar dan pemimpin masyarakat Yaman tentang perspektif dan amalan kepimpinan masyarakat mengikut gaya tempatan. Majlis pendidikan YCM boleh memulakan program untuk mendidik dan melatih generasi akan datang mengenai kontrak dan pengaturan sosial yang adil dan normatif yang mewujudkan keamanan dan keharmonian dalam kalangan masyarakat Islam dan sosial yang tidak stabil seperti di Yaman. Hasil kajian ini telah menyumbang kepada merapatkan jurang yang telah ada dalam konteks teori dan amalan pembangunan kepimpinan komuniti.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FYAM	Forum of Yemeni Academicians in Malaysia
FYBM	Forum of Yemeni Businessmen in Malaysia
GAWI	Gaith Association for Welfare Initiatives
IPVS	Islamic Perspective and Values System
NCP	National Cultural Policy
NDP	National Development Policy
OTB	Outline of a Theory of Practice
S&S	Stratagems and Spoils
UYSM	Union of Yemeni Students in Malaysia
YCAM	Yemeni Community Association in Malaysia
YCM	Yemeni Community in Malaysia
YECM	Yemeni Educational Council in Malaysia

LIST OF GLOSSARIES

<i>Adat</i>	Habits, customs
<i>Adel</i>	Justice
<i>Al-Jama'ah</i>	The group or gathering over one true and righteous idea
<i>Al-Ta'ah</i>	Obedience
<i>Al-urf al-qabali</i>	The tribal rules and customs of the Yemeni tribes
<i>Amanah</i>	Trust
<i>Al-Ummah</i>	The Muslim community and followers
<i>Awarah</i>	The part or whole of the body that should be covered from being seen
<i>Dewan</i>	The place in a house where meeting held for discussing public affairs
<i>Hadith</i>	The collection series of Prophet Muhammad's teachings and instructions
<i>Majlis</i>	The social institution for discussing public affairs
<i>Masauliah</i>	Responsibility
<i>Muafakat</i>	Approvals, agreements
<i>Muhasabah</i>	Accountability
<i>Shari'ah</i>	The Islamic Law, instructions and Traditions
<i>Shura</i>	Consultation
<i>Ulama</i>	The Islamic Scholars and Researchers
<i>Ummah</i>	The Muslim Community
<i>Ustaz</i>	The Islamic scholar who teaches Islamic instructions

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the nature of this study, exploring the habitus transition experience of the Yemeni Community leaders in Malaysia (YCM leaders) after having moved to the Malaysian sociocultural environment. It investigates how this experience affected their perspectives, beliefs, behaviours and practices of community leadership. The purpose was to examine the YCM leaders' development of the perceptions and the behaviours in attempting to practice community leadership. It demonstrates how YCM leaders learn by observing the local model of community leadership, and replicate that behaviour by means of incorporating aspects of the local model with their own original practices to then create a hybrid style.

1.2 Background of the Study

YCM personnel have been experiencing different habitus of the host sociocultural influences so they have had to adapt and adopt new habiti from the new environment they find themselves in. Hence, they had opportunities to develop leadership roles by observing the local model of community leaders, who obviously have not gone through the process of traditional norms as practiced in the Yemeni sociocultural norms, which includes values of choosing community leaders and representatives. In Yemen, only traditional elite groups like tribal sheikhs, religious sheikhs, and certain family clan members exercise leadership and were chosen to be community leaders. When YCM leaders experienced the local practices, they shifted gradually toward the local norms and behaviours through modelling.

Among the Malaysian transiting society, community leaders such as social associations heads, businessmen, intellectual leaders, and influential figures in community with vast social networks and groups i.e. those possessing social capital, have better chances in exercising leadership. The Malaysian sociocultural situation has been transiting into a state-society and 'national-oriented habitus' instead of experiencing a situation where there are local conflicting communities. Community leaders are engaging in social, intellectual and economic institutions such as associations, business, factories, unions, syndicates, universities, and firms. Hence, they are practicing community leadership within the context that is centred more on 'capitals', i.e. economic capital, cultural capital, and social networks (social capital). On the contrary, Yemeni sociocultural norms are described as traditionally inherited community leadership positions. Sheikhs and tribal chiefs, religious sheikhs such as *ulama* (scholars), and community leaders who inherited their position and social status have the legitimate right to be community leaders.

Klenke (1996) stated that “leadership *is a socially constructed concept by the context, values and experiences of society*”. YCM leaders have demonstrated adoption and adaption through observing the local model of the Malaysian sociocultural norms of community leadership by pursuing social dispositions utilizing capitals. They have imitated the behavioural and perception aspects of these local norms. The Malaysian sociocultural context has a multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic structure. As a diaspora community, this experience taught YCM individuals that they cannot depend on the Yemeni traditional norms in exercising community leadership in their interactions among the social structure in Malaysia. They have got involved in new habitual models of social dispositions such as to establish business, get higher educational degrees, create and contact big social networks and social groups. These actions have increased their ability to exercise community leadership and influence in the community’s new hybrid habitus, i.e. social structure system. (Pickel, 2005, P.11) argued that;

“Habiti are constantly changing. A social habitus may in fact change more quickly than the ‘personalized habiti’ in individuals, which seem to ‘ossify’ over time (more accurately, there is an ‘age-related reduction in cultural efficacy or efficiency”

Being exposed to the local sociocultural practices i.e., the Malaysian macrosystem, YCM leaders learnt that they needed new resources of power as a self-efficacy source. So, they resorted to accumulating *capitals*. The YCM Chief and his deputy have utilized three different ‘*capitals*’ to increase their legitimacy for exercising community leadership. The other YCM leaders however, did not follow and apply the same strategy. They depended mainly on educational and economic resources to practice social influence and exercise leadership. The YCM Chief had become a popular community leader prior to his election and when the community members and the embassy of Yemen suggested organizing elections to choose the YCM Chief, he won the elections based on his community leadership role. Other YCM leaders who had utilized the *sheikh* habitus to aspire for YCM leadership in Malaysia had failed to win as legitimate YCM leaders in the community's inaugural elections held in June, 2012. Hameed is a member of the Yemeni Community Association in Malaysia (YCAM) who experienced decline of his social power and influence among the YCM as a result of the decline of his economic and symbolic capital between the years 2013-2014.

Historically, Yemeni migration to Southeast Asia and the Malay Archipelago occurred at the end of the 19th century and continued during the twentieth century, especially from the eastern part of Yemen, Hadhramaut. Those waves of *Hadhramis* migration came as a result of different sociocultural and socioeconomic factors like drought and tribal wars in their homeland; however, the major motivating factor was economic, as migrants from Yemen, especially the *Hadhramis*, used to pursue trading opportunities in Southeast Asia. (UlrikeFreitag, W.G. & Clarence-Smith, 1996). During the initial waves of migration, the first migrants to Southeast Asia and Malay Archipelago were commonly men who were both traders and religious missionaries. The result of those migration waves was the emergence of Yemeni diasporic communities throughout

Southeast Asian countries, mainly Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (Mrs. Saidah Z. S. Hassan, 2005). Many of the immigrants married local women and dissolved within the local communities, but a considerable number of them maintained links to their homeland, culture and people (Mrs. Saidah, Z.S Hassan, 2005). The migrants have had to deal with different local conditions, characterized by different ecologies, economies, political systems and situations, as well as sociocultural and civilizational frameworks.

Being the first generation of YCM, certain families and clans dominated the Yemeni diaspora social activities, decision making and nexus of power. Some worked as religious leaders and religious instructors who taught the Holy Qur'an and Islamic instructions to the children of the immigrants' community and to the local community too. They practiced religious leadership that included *Ameers or Imams* (religious leaders). Also, these instructors had social power and influence, holding leadership roles and having decision-making powers. However, the new generations acquired the host community's habitus and learnt from the Malaysian sociocultural context, which witnessed transiting into more egalitarian, multicultural approaches regarding new habitus and strategies of engaging in community leadership practices.

The Yemeni diaspora population in Malaysia is approximately forty thousand people, concentrated in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Penang, Terengganu, Johor and Kelantan. However, many of them still maintain links with the homeland. The new generations have absorbed the Malaysian sociocultural habitus over the passage of decades. They have adapted and adopted the Malaysian sociocultural habitus for both their individual lifestyle and also for the community's sociocultural hierarchic structure and power relations. The Yemeni immigrant community in Malaysia has been characterized by being highly adaptive and open to the host community. They did not create a special type of community, with predefined cultural characteristics that originate in their own homeland. While some leaders of the Yemeni immigrants became power brokers and joined the elite groups in Malaysia, another segment of them experienced exclusion and even discrimination (Tang Abdullah, 2009).

The last waves of the Yemeni immigrants have been living and increasing in Malaysia for the last three decades and they have been adjusting according to their habitus gradually and adopted community leadership strategies similar to the Malaysian socio-cultural model. During the last three decades (1985–2016), about 28,000 Yemeni people arrived in Malaysia and about 8,000 of them came as students¹. Many Yemeni immigrants, especially the students, returned to Yemen after they had lived in Malaysia between six to eleven years. Some, on the other hand, decided to settle, marry and work in Malaysia and these individuals experienced gradual habitus shift while maintaining certain basic cultural traditions and cultural practices of the homeland.

¹ Yemen Embassy, Yemeni Community in Malaysia and Yemeni Cultural Attaché archives (2013-2016).

Tang Abdullah (2005) viewed the *Yemeni Hadhrami* experience in Malaysia as one of assimilation, i.e. complete habitus shift and following the local model in individual life and in social disposition. This was facilitated through the sharing of the same religion (Islam) with the Malaysian society, and because of their adaptive nature. The first generations of the *Hadhramis* migrants blended in with Malaysian society through religion and marriage. They became proficient in the Malay language and adapted the local society's lifestyle and perceptions, i.e. the sociocultural habitus of the host society. However, the Yemeni immigrant community still remained discrete, despite a certain level of indigenization having taken place over the decades, through ethnic associations, clan names and intermarriages. Yemeni immigrants shared one religion, Islam, with the local communities which played a major role in their assimilation with the host society in Malaysia. They established Islamic associations and Islamic leaderships and some cultural institutions such as religious schools and some journals (Tang Abdullah, 2009, P. 51- 56).

Yemeni Hadhramis in Malaysia have an annual forum organized by a group of Malaysian figures from Yemeni Hadrami origins, *the Malaysian Hadhramis*. It is held in May every year for three days. Every year, it is held in a different part of Malaysia as; Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kelantan and Johor. Most of the participants were mainly from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand. Some Yemeni people were invited to participate from Southeast Asian countries especially Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei. Lately, the forum sponsors invited some Arab immigrants to join the annual event. It has been named "Forum of *Yemeni Hadhramis* in Southeast Asia"². The conference is a Yemeni traditional elderly-led association where some aspects of the Yemeni traditional habitus are still practiced among them. For example, young participants acquiesced to the community's old leaders' rules and there was very limited participation of women in the forum. This phenomenon is happening even though the participants have lived in the Malaysian sociocultural context for decades. They acquired their habitus of the Yemeni sociocultural practices from their interactions with their homeland immigrants in Malaysia. Some of them had not lived in, nor visited Yemen for more than two decades. For a person engaged in some of the Malaysian social and cultural activities, it was obvious that a large part of their social and cultural interactions, including that of women and young participants, were still reflective of some of the Yemeni sociocultural norms and habitus. This phenomenon attracted the writer's attention as to how the YCM and diaspora still practice some Yemeni traditional sociocultural practices of community leadership though they have been living in the host transiting sociocultural context for more than three decades.

Commencing January 2014, after conducting a preliminary research and initiating investigations through conversations, as well as performing several observations about YCM main influential figures and leaders, the researcher decided to widen the investigation to explore how YCM individuals are blending certain Yemeni sociocultural norms and traditions with the local ones. The purpose also, was to understand how YCM leaders are experiencing a habitus transition regarding exercising community leadership. How did YCM leaders shift their perspectives about

² In November, 2017, it was held in Jakarta, Indonesia with about one thousand participants.

attaining social power and practices with gradual adaptive and adoptive strategies and changes? There used to be great variation among the Yemeni community leaders in bearing responsibility and power in Malaysia, whereas in the homeland of Yemen, their traditional habitus allows only specific social classes, like religious leaders, villages' chiefs and tribal sheikhs' families to dominate decision making and play major roles in the social life and in the public arena. Women used to gather in separated places from men and were involved in different activities, experiencing limited social life in the public arena (Austin, 2007 & Al-Salahi, 2001).

Traditionally, there are four main sectors that have had great influence and power in social interactions and community leadership practices in the Yemeni sociocultural structure; gender, social class, age, and clan family. These factors used to determine and limit social and individual actions of the community. As far as gender was concerned, males used to dominate females; social class systems allowed only religious figures, wealthy families, and tribal sheikhs to dominate leadership activities and social interactions; as for the age factor, only elderly figures used to initiate or change the rules of the structure, supervised and maintained social structure; while clan family influence is exemplified by the Sayyids, a family clan that claimed to be Prophet Mohammed's descendants, and practiced cultural and ideological domination. In his argument of how habitus processes change according to the change of the social sociocultural systems of immigration communities, Pichel explained that;

“At the same time, carried by individuals and groups, habiti can move to ‘new’ social systems where they survive (usually in hybrid form) or quickly disappear. Immigrant communities provide rich empirical evidence for such processes” (Pichel, 2005, p.11).

The relationship between the Sayyids and the rest of the community, i.e. non-Sayyids was as a superior (someone who sets the rules) and an inferior (someone who obeys the rules) relationship. Women, lower class individuals, poor, and simple individuals had not the right to negotiate their rights and choices or to participate in their community decision making. Younger generations used to receive orders from older individuals as part of the traditional norm in the Arabian Peninsula whereby the elder son of the sheikh is the one who occupies his father's position as the leader of the tribe, and acts according to the established social structure rather than making his own choices (Sheila Carapico, 1998 & Al-Salahi, 2001).

YCM leaders came from that very hierarchic, structured society and standards of community leadership habitus as explained above. Then, they migrated to the Malaysian environment that had different sociocultural context, transiting social structures and systems including different perspectives and practices of community leadership. Malaysian society to some extent, is transiting into less structured and has more dynamic habitus compared to Yemeni society because it has that type of sociocultural uniqueness as being a multi- cultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic society. Also, the Malaysian society is becoming more globally oriented due to factors

such as economic, cultural and technical openness (Riddle, 2001). This transiting sociocultural environment has made Yemeni immigrants work to readjust themselves within the socio-cultural context of the Malaysian one. To some extent, this has conditioned the different cultural values between the Yemeni and Malaysian socio-cultural context. YCM leaders needed to adjust their habitus socio-culturally to create communications and connections with the Malaysian sociocultural structural context. Yemeni immigrants are Muslims and the majority of the Malaysians share the same religion; to some extent, this factor took an important role in facilitating the assimilation of the Yemeni leaders, and individuals in general, with the Malaysian sociocultural environment.

YCM leaders have demonstrated this struggle for adaption and adoption to the new social dispositions by mixing the Yemeni traditional habitus with the Malaysian one. They pursued to maximize and attain '*capitals*', i.e. economic capital, social capital and cultural capital. They involved themselves in business, got higher education and they established vast social networks. Educated leaders nowadays share the practice of leadership regardless of their social background or fathers' professions. Women also advanced to become influential agents and succeeded in attending men's meetings which was not common in Yemen society yet. YCM leaders have demonstrated more egalitarianism by the passage of time among the new sociocultural context. Based on these preliminary observations and notices, YCM leaders have been experiencing habitus transition in social power relations, power acquisition, and influence in decision making processes and position.

This study explored how YCM leaders, as participants, conceptualize and practice community leadership. It discussed how their habitus transition reflects changes of strategies they utilized for pursuing and legitimating their positions as community leaders among YCM, after they have been experiencing the new host sociocultural habitus. It investigated how they observe the local model of community leaders, and also how they have mixed their own traditional habitus i.e. social norms, forms and perspectives about the concept of community leadership and leadership practice with those in the host society.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Since the year 2011, more than 13,000 Yemeni immigrants mobilized from their homeland to the Malaysian context. The Malaysian sociocultural and socioeconomic context is an active, dynamic and transiting one. The Yemeni immigrants came from a war-torn sociocultural and socioeconomic background. The last wave of the Yemeni immigrants created two major problems; how Yemeni individuals would react and adapt in the new sociocultural and socioeconomic context. The second problem is how Yemeni individuals would pursue social disposition in the new different ecological systems context. The YCM leaders' experience of community leadership had two major issues; their relationship with each other and their relationship with the local society ecological system, i.e., the new environmental social structures.

There are few studies that discussed how Yemeni immigrant individuals act and develop in their interactions with the local systems in different sociocultural contexts such as in America, Britain, Germany and China. Sarroub (2001) discussed Yemeni individuals' experience in the American society. She demonstrated that they "*remain isolated from various aspects of American life while maintaining ties to their homeland.*" Jumaih (2010) demonstrated that Yemeni individuals in England resorted and constrained their communications and lifestyle with people from Yemen and the Middle East who had the same sociocultural background.

Studies that examined Yemeni community in Malaysia (Aboshouk, 2009; Abdullah, A. 1996; Bajunid, 1996) demonstrated that it is an assimilation and adaption experience. However, other studies that mentioned Middle Eastern and Yemeni diaspora in Malaysian sociocultural interaction with the local community, (Shome, 2002) postulated that it was not assimilation. They ascertained that the communications between them and the local society were limited to the religious festivals and rituals. Two important notices on these qualitative studies include that they did not explore the ways that YCM leaders transit their perspectives and behaviours within the time frame. The other notice is that they did not conduct a cross-generational qualitative investigation comprised of a purposeful sample.

This study was designed to address this gap in research by exploring YCM leaders, as the participants, and their experience of habitus developmental changes regarding community leadership. This process of investigation will lead to understanding this change, and the YCM leaders' mechanisms of adapting and learning from the Malaysian sociocultural context, i.e., the micro- meso- exo- and macro-system. It will explore the factors in the local context that influence this developmental change other than religious rituals and the process of reforming of perception of community leaders.

On the other hand, some YCM leaders encourage YCM members to use strategies such as learning the Malay language. Others encourage them to understand the Malaysian laws and regulations and obey them as a way to organize and develop the relationship between YCM and the local context. This study was organized to address this by; (a) exploring YCM leaders' perspective and behavioural changes about community leadership, (b) understanding how YCM leaders contest for the position of community leader, (c) exploring the influence of the Malaysian ecological system context on YCM leaders' habitus transition, and (d) investigating the challenges that YCM leaders are facing especially YCM women leaders. The previous premise rationalizes the need to conduct a cross-generational qualitative investigation that is comprised of a purposeful sample of the most influential twelve YCM leaders to explore the habitus transition process. It assists to understand how they interacted, learnt and were influenced by the local micro- meso- exo- and macro-system of habitus regarding community leadership. It observes how YCM leaders adapt and assimilate the local habitus, acquiring characteristics and resources as community leaders as they experience the Malaysian socio-cultural environment.

This implication will assist in understanding and accelerating both YCM leaders and Yemeni immigrants' habitus transition toward the Malaysian sociocultural structure that encompasses cooperation, tolerance and performing according to the normative rules. That step will enhance the importance of cultivating and training the next generations of YCM leaders as well as setting up YCM schools and enabling adult students to increase their awareness of the multicultural nature of the Malaysian sociocultural context regarding community leadership.

1.4 Research Questions

The following general research question was formulated and is followed by four specific questions: How did Yemeni community leaders in Malaysia experience habitus transition regarding community leadership while experiencing the Malaysian environmental context?

- 1- How Yemeni community leaders in Malaysia develop the perception and practice of community leadership?
- 2- How did Yemeni community leaders in Malaysia contest for the position of community leader? And how did they formulate the model of the community leader?
- 3- How was the YCM leaders' habitus transition influenced by the Malaysian ecological systems context?
- 4- What challenges are YCM leaders and YCM women leaders experiencing? And why?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how YCM leaders develop their perspective and practices regarding community leadership influenced by the Malaysian environmental context. The specific objectives of the study are discussed below as;

1. The study tried to explore how YCM leaders transit their habitus regarding community leadership from the Yemeni traditional sheikh perception to the perception of the *Raees* (president). How did they develop community practices from sheikhs' *Dewaan* to the community *Majlis* and from Yemeni sociocultural practices to the Malaysian ones? It follows YCM leaders' transiting behaviours from the Sheikh perception to the chiefs to the *Raees* (elected president), as the representative one.
2. The study tried to investigate how YCM leaders develop and adapt community leadership self-efficacy, including their new styles and strategies to contest for the position of the community leader. It seeks to describe how YCM leaders reformulate the image and model of the community leader influenced by the Malaysian sociocultural context. It also addresses how they utilized and acquired new resources, skills and strategies, and learnt from the local

environment of how to build and sustain a sense of confidence to exercise community leadership?

3. The study tried to explore and describe how the Malaysian sociocultural context i.e., environmental characteristics influenced YCM leaders' developmental changes. The Malaysian environment has ecological variety such as the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, socioeconomic transiting status and progressive public policies for better understanding of the phenomenon. This objective will serve to build a new approach of the community leadership for Yemeni citizens who experience the Malaysian environment and return to Yemen.
4. The study seeks to investigate the challenges that YCM leaders and YCM women leaders experience. This will shed light on how YCM leaders, especially women leaders, develop their strategies and mechanisms to adapt to the new environment. The study seeks also, to understand the challenges that YCM women face in the new environment on the four ecological levels.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be significant in the attempt to achieve the following:

The findings are contributing to the understanding of the developmental changes and adaptive behaviours, both perception and behaviour, that have been experienced by the YCM leaders regarding community leadership issues influenced by the Malaysian sociocultural characteristics. In other words; how do YCM leaders got accustomed and adapted to the local environment? This study provided an examination and explanation about the transition of the process of acquiring social power and power engagement among YCM leaders by adapting and adopting some sociocultural norms of the local environment.

The study contributes to the understanding of new adaptive behavioural patterns of YCM in the relationship between YCM members who had been mobilized to different ecological systems. It is important to understand the new adaptive behavioural patterns of the relationship between the YCM leaders and the surrounding environment and how YCM leaders facilitate the communication between the YCM and the Malaysian surrounding systems, either as local community establishments or state institutions.

Implicit in this research is the importance of cultivating and training the next generation of YCM leaders as well as Yemeni community new immigrants to increase their awareness of the Malaysian micro- meso- exo and macro- systems regarding community leadership to change the perspective and practice (habitus) of community leadership from a position of domination, authority and monopoly of power and resources into a perspective of position of participation, responsibility and service. Also, this study aims to develop tomorrow leaders' habitus of community leadership of the country's social and political life and develop women's leadership abilities and skills.

This study contributes to the understanding of a paradigm that establishes a community leadership model that creates harmony, sharing, tolerance, and development to YCM. Different paradigms of community leadership require a deep understanding and investigating of the experience of the YCM habitus transition regarding community leadership. Brodbeck stated that, "*the more we know about the leadership/culture impact point, the more effective the management of today's and tomorrow's diversity will be*" (Brodbeck, F.C., Frese, M., Akerblom, S., Audia, G., Bakacsi, G., Bendova, H., et al. 2000, P.73).

Also, understanding the challenges of the YCM leaders will lead to create an approach to assist the YCM leaders and members to overcome the obstacles of societal process and social engagement with the local environment. Studies conducted on Yemeni immigrants in Western societies such as USA and UK discussed the problem of socialization and adaption. The studies that have been done about Yemeni immigrants in Malaysia discussed the concept or idea of assimilation and accommodation (Abushouk. A. Ibrahim & Ibrahim. H. Ahmed, 2009). However, there is no study that handled the process of socialization or how YCM learnt from the local environment by observing and modelling.

1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how YCM leaders develop their perspective and practices regarding community leadership, influenced by the Malaysian sociocultural context. This study was established on the base of analysing participants' habitus transition of the concept and behaviour of community leadership. The context of the setting for this study was the Yemeni community leaders in the Malaysian sociocultural environment. The study followed certain standards:

- The study utilized Uri Bronfenbrenners' bio-ecological system theory and Bandura's social cognitive theory as the framework.
- The study utilized the process of observation, interview, and documentation as a method for data collection. The observation process started before conducting the participants' interviews because the researcher has access to the YCM leadership and activities.
- The study followed the course of the YCM leaders from the year 2007, for many reasons, through scanning the YCAM documentation and through meeting informants who had mobilized to Malaysia since 2007.
- The study focused on the YCM leaders who were active leaders and played active roles among the Yemen community in Malaysia. Some of the YCAM leaders were not active, so the study excluded them as participants.

There are several limitations to this study: the respondents, instruments, and research process. Respondents are the YCM leaders who exercised community leadership roles among the YCM and who had spent more than five years in Malaysia. There are two reasons for that; the first reason is that the Yemeni immigrants who migrated to the

Malay Archipelago for decades have absorbed and embodied the Malaysian habitus. Those who had not transited to the hybrid model of the habitus would not enable the researcher to trace and investigate the shift process. Even though they are still maintaining some of their homeland traditional rituals and costumes, they have been absorbed in the Malaysian society and shifted totally to the Malaysian sociocultural habitus. The second reason is that the habitus transition process cannot fulfil the transfer in just few years, an individual needs years to absorb, practice and comprehend the thoughts, ideas, perspectives, norms, customs (i.e., *habiti*) of a new sociocultural structure even if he looks like he is familiar with the host environment or shares some cultural aspects or practices such as religious ones.

The habitus concept has its psychosomatic and subconscious process of adjustment, i.e. it requires years to settle. The habitus is acquired during the primary and secondary socialization. The secondary habitus is formed from education and from other life experiences (Bonnewitz, 2005). To understand the Yemeni community in Malaysia's leadership process of internalizing the external and the development of the secondary habitus, the study focused on YCM leaders who have been living in Malaysia between five years to more than thirty years. The study has utilized qualitative method for collecting data, especially, participant observations and in-depth open-ended interviews with the respondents for obtaining deeper understanding of YCM leaders in the Malaysian sociocultural context.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Habitus from Latin, means literally *habit* or disposition. Habitus is built from dispositions, conceptions, cognitions, and world perspectives. The concept of habitus is the characteristics of patterns of thinking, feeling, behaving and interacting of an individual within the social structure. It is influenced and generated by the person's social context and social system (Bourdieu, 1990; Jenkins, 1992; Lingard & Christie, 2003). For Bourdieu, the habitus is a generating principle for strategy that enables actors to deal with unexpected and changeable situations. It is a type of preparation or a kind of mental and cognitive structure that has the ability for development and transferring which works every time, mostly unconsciously, taking advantage of previous experiences as a matrix of evaluations and perceptions. This mechanism enables the human agents to achieve endless varied missions. He defined habitus, as a system of "*durable, transposable dispositions*" (Logic of Practice, P. 53).³

Habitus Transition Habitus transition is the individual's process of changing and transferring attitudes and behaviours by practicing different sociocultural structures through learning, adapting, and adopting the new sociocultural structural context, i.e., *the interplay of the agency and structure* over time. This process results in reproducing

³ <http://studymore.org.uk/xybou.htm#1980p53Habitus>

and recreating new patterns of hybrid habitus that reshape the practices and structures in return.

The Capital, All the resources that leaders maintain and with which they determine their social position in the social space within each field whereby agents augment, profit, and mobilize in order to enter and move on social field. The concept of *capital* includes whatever agents use or invest in their practices i.e. every effort capitalized as an instrument in the social competition is considered capital.

The Human Agency: Theory of Practice explained the dialectic relationship between '*the human agent*' and the social structure as they influence each other. This relationship is a dialectic which results in the agents recreating that social structure with structural conditions. Practice is a human activity done by an (agent) who have the ability to make a difference among the global entity called '*the system*', i.e. the social structure. The (agent) is a person who has accumulated experiences, symbolic capital, gained through the process of raising and learning that lead to generate a group of dispositions that enable the agent to practice different actions through specific structure, spontaneously and unconsciously most of the time.

1.9 Organization of the Study

This thesis has been divided into five chapters, organized as the following:

Chapter One presented the statement of the problem and the background of the study, the purpose of the study, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, scope and limitations of the study, and the definition of relevant terms.

Chapter Two presented the related literature to provide an understanding of the nexus of habitus shift of community leadership; the perspective and the practice. It discussed the theories underpinning community leadership strategies in different ecologies, and compared them to IPVS of leadership exercises and social dispositions.

Chapter Three presented research design, conceptual framework and theoretical framework, description of the study area, methodological approach, methods of field study, unit of sampling and methodological instruments.

Chapter Four examined the four major themes of the study; how YCM transit and reform their identity and interact methods with each other, the process of the habitus shifts of the YCM as the changing, developing, adapting, adopting maintaining process. It discussed YCM perspective of community leadership, the hybrid habitus of the Yemeni leaders, how they shift to the Malaysian sociocultural standards of leadership, how he practices leadership, how he builds, accumulates, exchanges and converts capitals and invest in symbolic power.

Chapter Five presented the study summary, conclusions, implications and recommendations.

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